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THE COTTON MOTH

Great swarms of small brown moths, appearing late in the fall in various cities in the north, have attracted considerable attention. They are pale-brown in color with a small spot in the center of each fore wing and having a wing spread of about one and one-third inches. Many requests for information concerning these insects are received each year by the department.

Known scientifically as Alabama argillacea and commonly called "Cotton moths," these long-distance travelers come up from the south. About the middle of September and in October many of them for reasons not well understood migrate northward. They cause some damage to ripening fruits mainly peaches and grapes, and some vegetables during their travels, by breaking the skin and sucking the juices. At night they may be found in great numbers, on lighted store windows or congregated on light poles and fixtures.

The caterpillar of these moths are known as "Cotton leaf worms," and are more or less destructive every year in the cotton belt of the south, where they feed entirely on cotton, eating the foliage and also attacking the blossoms and squares. In this stage they are easily controlled by arsenical sprays.

When the caterpillars are full grown, they spin frail silken cocoons between one or two leaves that they tie together with silken threads. The moths emerge from these cocoons after the usual metamorphosis. There are several generations each year.

Natives of the tropical regions, cotton moths enter the United States from Central and South America each year; but these migratory hosts all succumb finally to the cold weather of the north.

